SCM Studies in Communication and Media

An Affiliate Journal of the International Communication Association

Communicative representation

SCM Special Issue – Call for Papers

Guest Editors: Benjamin Krämer, Mario Haim, Thomas Hanitzsch, Anna Sophie Kümpel, Carsten Reinemann, Diana Rieger, Constanze Rossmann & Sophia Volk (LMU Munich)

The idea of communicative representation has a long history in media and communication research, where it has been discussed under various terms (including, e.g., bias, Groeling, 2013; diversity, Magin et al., 2025; or stereotyping, Seiter, 1986), and questions of representation have also been raised in other social sciences and the humanities (e.g., Hall, 1997; Pitkin, 1967; Prendergast, 2000). In our discipline, scholars have asked how individuals, groups, organizations, and social systems are portrayed in various media outlets and formats, and how they present themselves on different platforms (e.g., Fürst et al., 2021; Haim & Jungblut, 2021; Harris & Willis, 2026; Painter, 2019). Researchers have also asked who can speak for themselves, who speaks for whom, and who is not represented or is represented only negatively (e.g., Bleich et al., 2015; Montiel-McCann, 2023). Depending on the perspective, representation can be considered legitimate or illegitimate, appropriate or inappropriate, more or less effective, and so on. Normatively, representation can be linked to democracy, to norms of public discourse, and to journalistic standards of balance and diversity (Starkey, 2017), but the concept can also be used descriptively.

Although representation is an evergreen topic in media and communication studies, it has taken on new significance in a changing media environment and under shifting social conditions. At least three trends make representation particularly timely for communication research, and submissions to this special issue should further elaborate, supplement, or critically examine them:

1. *New forms of access to communication*: It is not a new observation that online media provide more direct access to public communication, bypassing traditional mass media gatekeepers (Neuberger, 2007). However, this observation needs further elaboration and nuance regarding the representation of different groups and perspectives. Who actually has the motivation and the individual and/or collective agency to articulate their perspectives online? Which perspectives come to the fore when new media environments promise universal access technically but are subject to specific rules and power structures? And what role do intermediary institutions such as journalism, political parties, or NGOs still play? The increasingly blurry boundaries between public and private communication also make it harder to define what representation means or what kind of representation matters in open or closed forums.
2. *The uniqueness of media content and individual media diets*: Representation in public arenas has never entailed universal visibility or recognition by all segments of the public. Rather, the public sphere has always been characterized by a degree of fragmentation and supplemented by semi-public and private

3. modes of communication. While counter-public spheres and alternative media have received significant scholarly interest (e.g., Atton, 2015; Jackson & Kreiss, 2023), it is now more difficult than ever to analyze representation as a process happening in a single public sphere constituted by traditional mass media. On many platforms, personalized feeds—generated specifically for each user and episode of use—are the norm; recent AI technologies even allow for the generation of unique messages on a case-by-case basis. However, even if the texts or images that are generated or compiled are not exactly the same in each situation, algorithmic curation and/or creation are based on patterns in data representing social patterns—whether such representations are intentional or unintentional, nuanced, or highly stereotypical. These patterns range from simple grammatical rules to traces of past and ongoing discrimination. In an age of unique feeds and AI-generated outputs, to what extent can shared perspectives on the world be represented at all in such algorithmic media environments, and to what extent can representations of some social group still become accessible and meaningful across different social contexts?
4. *New demands for representation*: Over time, new groups and movements have emerged that are making new demands on policymakers, the media, and other institutions to ensure that their perspectives and interests are effectively represented and recognized (Hobson, 2003). These range from movements that advocate for disadvantaged groups with a progressive impetus to currents that already perceive this advocacy as a reversal of legitimate hierarchies or as discrimination against those they view as the majority of the "normal" population. So who is making what claims to representation, where and to whom, and what conflicts arise from such claims?
New demands for representation are expressed not only through diverse campaigns and new social movements but also manifest in populist tendencies in current politics (Werner & Giebler, 2019). Furthermore, institutions such as established political parties, the media, and academia are criticized for representing only certain social groups and ideological perspectives. How do they deal with these sometimes-conflicting demands of representation? How do they navigate the dilemma between communication that is supposed to provide a common ground in an era of fragmentation and polarization, and communication that is expected to be responsive to increasingly diverse demands?

Representation should not be reduced to its narrowly political sense, although many claims and forms of representation inevitably take on a political connotation and often harbor the potential for conflict. But one might also ask, for example: Whom do companies target with their internal or external communication and what do stakeholders expect from them? To whom are health communication messages tailored? How has the proportion of members of certain minority groups in strategic communication professions changed over time? Who can identify with the characters and lifestyles portrayed in entertaining media content, and who criticizes it for not representing certain groups and perspectives, and so on?

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The special issue will address the classic topic of communicative representation in all its aspects, while also focusing on current changes, conflicts, and crises. Contributions from a wide range of perspectives are welcome:

Theoretical and normative perspectives

1. *Concepts and theory*: Conceptual and theoretical submissions, as well as submissions that identify, theoretically explain, or critically examine changes related to communicative representation. This includes normative, critical, and pedagogical perspectives, for example, submissions linking communicative representation to media criticism, media literacy, or education.

Empirical perspectives along the communication process

2. *Actors, production, and structural conditions*: Studies that relate different forms of representation and demands for representation to structural conditions. These may include economic circumstances and organizational structures, media systems, or different forms of media regulation. Such conditions may, for example, affect the chances of different social groups being represented in communicative professions or portrayed favorably in certain types of media content. We also welcome studies on how ordinary media users articulate demands for representation or produce content meant to contribute to the public representation of social groups they identify with or advocate for.
3. *Media content:* Studies examining the representation of different groups, perspectives, and interests in various media content, for example, in journalism, strategic communication, science, health, and sports communication. Examples are methodologically innovative analyses of representation (potentially including visual representation) or comparisons across time, social groups, or contexts.
4. *Perception and effects:* Studies on the perception and impact of different forms of representation. Who feels well represented by which types of communication, and what consequences does this have, for example, for attitudes or for individual and collective action? Submissions need not be restricted to political representation. They may also address how people perceive themselves to be portrayed and addressed in areas such as entertainment, advertising, health communication, or lifestyle content.

Methodological and reflexive perspectives

5. *Methodological challenges*: Submissions addressing the methodological challenges of investigating representation with regard to media production, content, reception, and effects. What does representativeness mean when claims to representation are made by increasingly differentiated groups, or when media content is increasingly tailored to specific individuals and situations? How can singular media content, such as unique feeds or AI outputs, be analyzed on a meaningful scale? What does it mean for surveys when some respondents expect nuanced linguistic representation of minorities in the instruments, while others perceive this as ideologically charged and suggestive?
6. *Representation in the field*: Studies and reflections on representation in media and communication research itself. Which social and scholarly perspectives are represented in the academic institutions and publications of our field, and why? We

hope to receive submissions that offer a fresh perspective on disparities, continuities, and changes in the field with regard to representation.

With this special issue, we aim to bring together, invigorate, and critically discuss research on communicative representation. We hope to receive submissions on the above-mentioned or other aspects of the topic from a wide range of theoretical and methodological perspectives.

Submission Instructions
SCM is an Open Access Journal of the German Communication Association (DGPuK) and Affiliate Journal of the International Communication Association (ICA). Accepted papers will be published as Open Access without additional costs.

We invite submissions that fit any of the SCM formats: *Extended paper* (50–60 pages), *Full paper* (15–20 pages), and *Research-in-brief* (5–10 pages). Manuscripts should be prepared in accordance with the SCM guidelines: https://www.nomos.de/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/SCM-Author_Guidelines_and_Checklist_2025.pdf

Interested authors are asked to submit ***abstracts*** (up to 750 words excluding references) for review by the guest editors. In their abstract, authors should also specify which of the SCM formats they intend to submit their full paper for. Accepted authors will then be invited to submit a full paper which will undergo peer review. Therefore, acceptance of an abstract does not guarantee publication in the special issue.

Timeline:

- Abstract submission deadline: 15 January 2027
- Notifications of proposal acceptance: 08 February 2027
- Full paper deadline: 15 April 2027
- Peer review process: April 2027–October 2027
- Publication of the special issue: 4/2027

Abstracts and manuscripts are to be submitted to Benjamin Krämer (kraemer@ifkw.lmu.de). Please contact the guest editors for any inquiries regarding the special issue.

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